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AUTHOR Takei, Yoshimitsu
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ABSTRACT

The issue of school desegregation does not affect most Asian/Pacific Americans today due to their small number, geographic dispersion, heterogeneity based on differences in ethnic identities, and variations in their degree of cultural and social assimilation into American society. Before 1965 most of the Asian and Pacific American young people were acculturated second and third generation Americans: however, the number of foreign born, limited English speaking children of Asian or Pacific background in the schools began to increase steadily after that year. The relatively small number of Chinese American children, for example, probably promoted their supervision by adults in the community, thereby reducing opportunities to become delinquent as well as increasing social and emotional support for doing well in school. Favorable employment situations between the 1940s and 1960s also promoted the cultural assimilation of the descendents of the earlier immigrants. After 1965, however, the evidence of social and racial discrimination encountered by Asian and Pacific Americans in the areas of employment, housing, educational and social services becomes more visible. (Author/JCD)

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ASIAN-PACIFIC EDUCATION

AFTER BROWN AND LAU

Yoshimitsu Takei
Division of Education Policy Studies
The Pennsylvania State University

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ASIAN-PACIFIC EDUCATION AFTER BROWN AND LAU

Introduction

The issue of school desegregation represents a different reality to Asian-Pacific Americans than it does to Black Americans. Due to their small number, geographic dispersion, heterogeneity based on differences in ethnic identities, and variations in their degree of cultural and social assimilation into U. S. society, school desegregation is not a salient issue to most Asian-Pacific Americans today. However, the concern by some over issues of more equitable opportunities and treatment in this society are shared by members of other minority groups who also are exposed to discrimination on the basis of ascriptive criteria. This paper will discuss these themes albeit in a rather cursory manner due to limitations of time and space.

Asian-Pacific Americans: The Historical Background

Since the current situation of Asian-Pacific Americans in the U. S. is partly a result of historical events in this society, we shall begin by looking at selected aspects of this country's past which are relevant to Asian-Pacific Americans. For them, as well as for other minorities,[1] one of the more important historical facts is

[1] Following the suggestion of Yetman and Steele (1971:3-4), I shall use the term "minority" and "majority" in reference to difference in power. Therefore, a "minority" could be a larger group numerically, but is a minority nevertheless if they have less power than another group.

that Western European Protestants dominated the major institutions for most of this country's history. This group's control over the political, economic, and educational institutions meant that they were able to set the terms or conditions under which others were permitted to participate in the political and economic activities of this country. This meant that for Asian-Pacific peoples, decisions concerning whether or not they would be permitted to enter this country and, if so, how many; whether or not they could become citizens; and what kinds of work they could obtain were to a large extent made for them by those who represented the interests of the dominant Western Europeans. Changes in policies towards Asian-Pacific peoples usually reflected the fact that the interests of the dominant group were not always congruent or changed over time.

This generalization can be illustrated by the immigration policies of the U. S. government towards Asian-Pacific peoples. Immigration of Chinese and Japanese laborers during the 19th century was not only permitted, but actively promoted when American capitalists wanted cheap labor. However, the opposition of white workers to competition by Asians resulted in numerous attacks against Asians, especially the Chinese (Lyman, 1974:58-85). Furthermore, when the Asian laborers began to resist exploitation by participating in occasional strikes, they were deemed to be less desirable than they had been previously. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentleman's Agreement arrived at between the U. S. and Japanese governments in 1908 reduced

Chinese and Japanese immigration to a trickle. It is not an exaggeration to state that when their presence became a source of civil disorder and they were no longer as docile as they once were, the dominant group decided they did not want any more Asians coming to this country.

These earlier Asian immigrants are commonly depicted as sojourners. They were mostly single males and undoubtedly there is some validity to the claim that the majority hoped to save money and return to their homes in Asia. However, it should not be overlooked that this desire also reflected the expectation of the dominant group in this society. We should not forget that the U. S. government passed legislation denying Asians the privilege of becoming naturalized citizens. This had the effect of excluding them from engaging in various occupations where state laws and occupational associations denied permits to non-citizens. California led the way for other states to make it unlawful for non-citizens to own land, thereby restricting the opportunity for Asians to engage in farming (e.g., see Lyman, 1974:54-85, 115 and Peterson, 1971:38-54). Clearly, these laws were intended to keep foreign-born Asians available as cheap laborers and to discourage them from becoming permanent residents in this country.

When it suited the interests of the dominant group to adopt a less racist stance vis-a-vis Chinese and Japanese, the U. S. government did so with dispatch. During World War II, when China was an ally of the U. S., Chinese were declared eligible to become naturalized U. S.

citizens. Therefore, they were then permitted to enter those occupations from which aliens were barred and also to purchase land (Lyman, 1974:125-126). After the Korean War began and this country's leaders desired the Japanese government's cooperation in using Japan as a base of operations for the war, the U. S. government concluded a peace treaty with Japan and passed the Walter-McCarran Act which eliminated race as a bar to naturalization. This made Japanese aliens finally eligible to become U. S. citizens and thereby removed the legal restrictions preventing them from entering certain occupations and to own land (Peterson, 1971:108). It is worth noting that the government which had labelled the Japanese as dangerous aliens and interned 100,000 of them and their U. S. born children during World War II, decided that they were worthy of becoming citizens when international politics made it convenient to do so.

Asian-Pacific Americans and the Schools[2]

Before 1965

The largest groups of Asian and Pacific people in the U. S. prior to 1965 were the Chinese and Japanese. There were about 100,000 Chinese and approximately 25 thousand Japanese in the continental U. S. at the turn of the century. Since most of them were single males,

[2]Because its history is so different from the rest of the United States, this discussion will not include Hawaii.

there were few children of Chinese and Japanese ancestry of school age. The 1902 and 1927 court cases in California concerning their status vis-a-vis schools involved Chinese parents fighting school boards which were attempting to place Chinese American children in segregated schools (Lyman, 1974:178).[3] On the other hand, Chinese parents in Mississippi refused a 1929 segregation order to send their children to the "colored" schools in that state and established separate schools for their children (Lyman, 1974:177-178).

What undoubtedly happened to most of the first generation of Chinese and Japanese born in the U. S. during the first half of the 20th century was considerable assimilation into U. S. society. They learned the English language, tended to do fairly well in the schools, and entered occupations which were of higher status than their parents'. It should be noted that this process enabled them to pass on advantages to their children which their parents were unable to provide. This process contributed to the popularization of the myth that Chinese and Japanese were "model" minorities (e.g., Caudill and De Vos, 1956; Peterson, 1971; Kitano, 1969; Kwoh, 1948; and Yuan, 1966). I call this a myth because the employment situation in this society was extremely favorable after World War II and many young Americans were able to experience upward mobility during those years. Further evidence is needed to show that the rate of upward mobility for Asian

[3]Until 1947, the education code of California empowered school boards "to segregate and establish separate schools for Indian children or children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage" (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977).

Americans exceeded that of U. S.-born children of immigrants of other ethnic groups who were comparable to the Asian immigrants in terms of time of arrival, geographic residence, socio-economic background, etc., before we accept the proposition that the Chinese and Japanese Americans experienced extraordinary socio-economic success in this country.

After 1965

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated discriminatory quotas by national origin which were contained in the earlier immigration laws and liberalized immigration for Asians. Thus, while U. S. residents born in Asia numbered only about 12,500 in 1965, this number increased to more than 70,000 by 1972 (California Advisory Committee, 1975:11).

The influx of immigrants has changed the character of Asian and Pacific American children in the schools. While before 1965 most of the Asian and Pacific American young people in the schools were acculturated second and third generation Americans, the number of foreign-born, limited English-speaking Asian and Pacific Peoples children in our schools began to increase steadily after that year. This is suggested by census data which indicate that by the ea[illegible] 1970s, the majority of the Chinese, Korean, and Pilipino population in the U. S. were foreign-born (California-Advisory Committee, 1975: 11). The younger children who are foreign-born are less likely to

have problems adjusting to school than the older ones. Bilingual and bicultural programs will probably be useful for the latter group in making the transition to the American schools easier.

However, there are several demographic and political factors which will act to reduce the likelihood that schools will implement comprehensive bilingual and bicultural programs for Asian and Pacific American pupils. One of these factors is the lack of political power of Asian-Pacific Americans due to their small number, geographic dispersion, and heterogeneity in place of origin. U. S. Census data indicate that Asian and Pacific Americans constitute less than one percent of the U. S.'s population. The largest groups are Japanese, 588,000; Chinese, 432,000; Pilipino, 337,000 (California Advisory Committee, 1975:10 and 13); and the approximately 150,000 Vietnamese refugees who managed to find their way to the U. S. (Tu, 1976:133). Others include Hawaiians, Samoans, Guamanians, etc. About 60 percent of Asian and Pacific Americans live on the West Coast of the United States.

Only the Chinese Americans in the Chinatowns of San Francisco and New York are sufficiently numerous and residentially concentrated to be able to press for special programs in the schools for their children. However, as illustrated in the case of San Francisco, many Chinese-Americans find themselves at odds with the school system over the issues of desegregation and bilingual education. Lyman (1974:177) points out that a large number of Chinatown parents have been boycotting San Francisco's public schools since 1971. Objecting to the

required busing of elementary schoolchildren to desegregate schools, groups of Chinese parents organized "freedom schools" and thereby withheld their children from public schools.

On the other hand, the U. S. Supreme Court in 1974 handed down a unanimous decision in the case of Lau v. Nichols that the San Francisco Unified School District's failure to provide special assistance to nearly 2,000 Chinese-American students who do not speak English denies them a "meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program." The Supreme Court sent the case back to the U. S. District Court in San Francisco with an order that "appropriate relief" be fashioned by the school district and that it be subject to the approval of the court (Wang, 1976:240).

As described in detail by Wang (1976), the officials of San Francisco's school system turned out to be less than enthusiastic about implementing a bilingual-bicultural educational program. A year after the Lau decision, only a small fraction of the limited English-speaking pupils were receiving bilingual-bicultural education and the school district was depending almost entirely on federal and state funds to finance this effort. If the Reagan administration is able to carry out its plan to cut the federal budget, what little exists at the present in our schools in the form of bilingual-bicultural education may virtually disappear.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper began by asserting that the Western Europeans who dominated this society's major institutions for most of its history

established the terms or conditions under which others were deemed eligible to participate in the political and economic activities in this society. Various historical events concerning Asian-Pacific Americans were cited in this paper to justify that assertion. Asians born abroad were adjudged to be unacceptable as citizens until fairly recently. Their U. S.-born children were granted citizenship, but they had to become culturally assimilated before they could participate more fully in the political and economic spheres.

The extent to which they did so could be attributed to several factors. In the case of the immigrant Japanese, the fact that almost all were literate in Japanese meant that foreign-born Japanese parents were familiar with schools and probably were able to assist their children's adjustment to American schools (Peterson, 1971:14). The Japanese American child's visibility due to race might have discouraged delinquency and promoted conformity to demands of teachers. The relatively small number of Chinese-American children prior to 1965 probably served to promote their supervision by the adults in the community; thereby reducing opportunities to become delinquent, as well as giving social and emotional support for doing well in school.[4] The favorable employment situation in this country from the 1940s to the 1960s was another factor which promoted the cultural and social

[4]However, recent reports of delinquent and criminal activity among most by foreign-born youths in New York and San Francisco's Chinatowns suggest that many of the recent Chinese immigrant families are experiencing difficulty coping with the social and economic problems with which they are confronted in the urban areas of this country.

assimilation of the descendants of the earlier Asian-American immigrants.[5] Wong (1980) cites various studies indicating the high educational attainment of Asian Americans. For example, 30.8 percent of the Chinese males as compared to 14.4 percent of the white Americans had completed four or more years of college in 1970. Wong cites another study which reports that almost 90 percent of the second generation Japanese Americans have attended college.

Such data might cause some people to question whether or not Asian and Pacific Americans have any grounds for complaining about their situation in this country. If one takes into account the returns for education, however, evidence exists to indicate discrimination against them on the basis of race. For example, the 1970 census data showed that in the five metropolitan areas in the U. S. where Asians are concentrated, the average income of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino males with four or more years of college was only 83 percent, 74 percent, and 52 percent of the average income of white males (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1979:391). There is considerable evidence that Asian Americans are excluded from certain occupations and encounter difficulty in obtaining promotions. Consequently, underemployment for them is a problem which frequently goes unrecognized by whites.

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[5]That this process has been difficult is documented by Odo (1973). Asian American children in schools where they were a small minority frequently encountered abuse from non-Asian pupils and, as a consequence, suffered physically and emotionally while growing up in this society. Ironically, however, their social rejection by non-Asians probably contributed to their academic attainment to the extent that their social isolation excluded them from adolescent subcultures which denigrated academic achievement.

This problem is even more vexing for the foreign-born Asian and Pacific Americans (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1970:passim). This has led Hirata (1976:25) to argue that social scientists who study Asian and Pacific Americans from the perspective of assimilation processes or cultural pluralism "ignore the central fact that racism is an integral part of the American social system, and no amount of contact, communication and education is going to rid America of its racism without a simultaneous radical transformation of the economic and political arrangements of the society."

While some may think Hirata is being overly harsh, the material published by and for the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights amply document the problems encountered by Asian and Pacific Americans in the areas of employment, housing, education, and social services (e.g., U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1979; California Advisory Committee, 1975; and New York State Advisory Committee, 1977). When one also expands the scope of inquiry to include Black Americans, American Indians, and Spanish-speaking Americans, then the first part of Hirata's observation about U. S. being a racist society does not seem to be an exaggeration. Perhaps the situation is changing, but in the meantime there are still many Americans who are not receiving just treatment on the basis of their physical characteristics.

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